

Expatriated dual-career partners: hope and disillusionment

Agnieszka Kierner

Department of Management, Vaasan Yliopisto, Vaasa, Finland

244

Received 21 February 2018
Revised 26 May 2018
Accepted 2 July 2018

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to employ hope theory to explain the psychological process underlying the dual-career couple (DCC) family unit, during the full cycle of international relocation.

Design/methodology/approach – This qualitative study is based on in-depth interviews with 28 international dual-careerists. Hope theory is used to describe the evolution of their goals, pathways and agency thinking before, during, and after expatriation.

Findings – The study reveals that dual-career partners initially build goals, pathways, and agency to support family relocation to facilitate the expatriate's career goals, but later the absence of self-career realization means hope can diminish and the partner's career comes to drive the goals set for repatriation. Future assignments would be considered only if both partners can arrange relevant employment for themselves.

Practical implications – Companies should develop DCC support practices such as designing shorter assignments, ensuring that partners have work visas and support job seeking. Ideally, multinational corporations would employ the spouse in the DCC.

Originality/value – The study is one of the first to explore the evolution of the goals of DCCs during the entire expatriation process.

Keywords Dual-career couples, Goals, Expatriation, Repatriation, Career coordination, Hope theory

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

With an increase in the international mobility of the global workforce (Ravasi *et al.*, 2013), dual-career couples (DCCs) have come to represent a considerable share of the entire expatriate population in the last decade (Brookfield, 2016). These couples need to address special issues resulting from the necessity of career coordination (Känsälä *et al.*, 2015; Baird and Reeves, 2011), given that their experience of international relocation depends on the career progress of both partners. Several researchers note the importance of analyzing the interplay of attitudes and behaviors between individuals in DCCs, given that their decisions on global career exploration, adjustment and repatriation are interrelated (Harvey, 1998; Andreason, 2008). A particular understanding of the perspectives of both partners has been called for (Rusconi *et al.*, 2013; Känsälä *et al.*, 2015). Most of the current literature, however, has limited its focus to the experiences of one individual – the expatriate (Harvey, Napier and Moeller, 2009; Lauring and Selmer, 2010; Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011).

None of the few studies published on DCC expatriation (Kierner, 2015; Szkudlarek, 2010) analyzes the experiences of the couple through the full expatriation cycle to explain the dynamics of changing goals and behaviors while the couples go through their expatriation processes. This is surprising because it has been noted that there are significant differences in the nature of the couples' concerns before and after expatriation and that "once the dual career couple has expatriated, conflict/stress relative to the trailing spouse's career declines" (Harvey, 1998, p. 237). This is counterintuitive given that subsequent research (Lauring and Selmer, 2010; Andreason and Kinneer, 2005) highlights issues caused by the role and job availability for the partner. It is important to explain these phenomena as it has been observed that the partner plays a critical role in supporting the expatriate (Lauring and Selmer, 2010; Haslberger and Brewster, 2008). Understanding the dynamics of changes associated with spousal attitude may therefore help to explain the motivation, retention, and successful completion of assignments by expatriates, because these feelings of the partner have been observed to possibly have cross-over effects on the other family members (Andreason, 2008).



In this study, such dynamics are analyzed using hope theory, which has proved effective in analyzing the continuous and adaptive process of global career exploration by DCCs (Harvey, Novicevic and Breland, 2009). This theory defines hope as an individual's ability to identify pathways to achieve his or her desired goals, and to motivate themselves via agency thinking, that is, the perceived capacity to exploit pathways to achieve the desired goals (Snyder, 2002). The objective of this paper is to employ hope theory to explain the psychological process underlying the DCC family unit, during their full cycle of international relocation. Further, this study focuses on the career goals of the dual-career partners as they progress from international relocation decision making, through adjustment in the host location, to the repatriation decision. In addition, it observes the willingness to accept the next potential expatriation cycle and highlights the goals connected with it. From the theory perspective, this study extends application of hope theory from expatriate adjustment to a full cycle of international experience from the pre-departure stage to repatriation, and on to the next assignment stage. Furthermore, while earlier literature has focused on the assigned expatriates, as part of the current study, both the expatriate and the partner were interviewed to provide a comprehensive view of the situation, with particular focus on the discussion of dual-career partners. Finally, this study offers suggestions for human resource managers in multinational corporations on how to manage expatriation programs for DCCs.

Expatriation of DCCs

Rapoport and Rapoport (1969) first coined the term DCC and defined it as "a couple where both partners pursue careers and are married." The literature has since explored various characteristics of DCCs depending on their engagement in continual professional employment (Bradbury, 1994), psychological commitment to their work, and their desire for personal growth (Bruce and Reed, 1991). Further, DCCs have been defined as those couples in which partners have invested heavily in their careers because they offer the main source of self-fulfillment (Bird and Schnurman-Crook, 2005) or where both partners are employed and psychologically committed to their work (Harvey, 1998; Challiol and Mignonac, 2005). The last definition combining the requirements of active employment and psychological commitment to work of both partners is applied in this study, as further described in the research methodology section.

Literature defines various forms of expatriation such as assigned expatriation, where an expatriate is transferred by his or her employer to work in a foreign country, and self-initiated expatriation, where relocation is initiated by the employee. This research focuses on the cases of assigned expatriation, referring to the primary assigned expatriate as an expatriate and to their dual-career partners, who relocate with them, as a partner. DCCs need to coordinate their careers and may employ different strategies, from looking at careers in independent ways, through a hierarchical strategy (which is most prevalent when a man is the primary expatriate) to an equal strategy, which is often employed by female expatriates with male spouses (Känsälä *et al.*, 2015). A review of existing research on DCC expatriation outlines three distinct phases of the expatriation cycle, starting with issues preceding assignment (Harvey, Napier and Moeller, 2009), continuing with challenges faced during the assignment (McNulty and Moeller, 2017; Känsälä *et al.*, 2015), and concluding with issues relating to the repatriation of DCCs (Kierner and Suutari, 2017).

The growing realization of the importance of the dual-career partner in the relocation decision has generated an increased volume of research on partner-related antecedents to accepting international relocation. That research has resulted in a number of proposals in areas such as the personal characteristics of the partner, the family unit situation, the timing of the assignment, and the impact of location (e.g. Konopaske and Werner, 2005; Vance and McNulty, 2014). The personality of the partner has been argued to have a significant impact

on the decision, and attributes such as “adventurousness” (Konopaske *et al.*, 2005), education (Brandén, 2013) or the personal interests and agenda associated with working abroad (Tharenou, 2008) have been shown to have a positive impact on the partner’s willingness to accept an international assignment. Timing plays a similarly important role for at least two reasons: the partner’s career stage might, to varying degrees, allow for disruption (Moore, 2002) and the family life stage may be more or less conducive to relocation (Harvey, Napier and Moeller, 2009).

In the context of the expatriate adjustment during the assignment, authors have further looked into both the external (demands) and the internal (needs) elements, as part of the broader person-environment system (Haslberger *et al.*, 2012). Several components of the assignee life were investigated, such as work adjustment (e.g. Aycan, 1997), socio-cultural adjustment (Kupka and Cathro, 2007) and couple relationship adjustment (McNulty, 2012). The result of this investigation shows that the adjustment of a DCC creates a considerable amount of additional stress (Andreason and Kinneer, 2005). Additionally, the adjustment of assignees and their partners seems to be heavily interrelated among DCCs. Research evidence supports not only the concept of spill-over effects, when one dimension of the expatriate adjustment affects another, but also cross-over effects, where deficiencies in the adjustment of one family member affect the adjustment of the other members in the family unit (Andreason, 2008; Lazarova *et al.*, 2010).

Therefore, in the case of research on the adjustment of DCCs, the perspective of the partner is frequently analyzed. Those partners who intend to continue their career on assignment but do not find an appropriate job suffer from particular adjustment challenges, with a shift in attitudes about spending money and a sense of loss of control (Braseby, 2010). Some studies address the interpersonal family conflict that frequently develops in such a situation, which limits the adjustment of all the family members (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002), because the business contacts, perception of self-worth, financial independence, and identity of jobless dual-career partners can be disrupted (Andreason, 2008).

Repatriation, defined as the return of the expatriate and family to their home country, remains a less studied aspect of global work assignments (Szkudlarek, 2010) despite evidence demonstrating the difficulty associated with repatriation adjustment and reports showing that the majority of repatriated employees and partners are dissatisfied with the repatriation process, experiencing career, organizational, financial, family and psychological challenges (Sánchez-Vidal *et al.*, 2008). However, the same issue on repatriation satisfaction has recently been presented in a different light in the specific case of DCCs, where the repatriation process can be considerably more positive than previously believed, particularly based on the findings from single-career expatriate studies (Kierner and Suutari, 2017). It is important to note that beside repatriation, expatriates also have a career option of staying in the international job markets for an extended period of time through new or extended assignments (Brookfield, 2016).

Hope theory

A relevant perspective on the satisfaction of dual-career expatriates and their partners from their expatriation processes can be formed by comparing their expectations with their actual experiences (Suutari and Brewster, 2003), with the use of the theory of met expectations (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001). In literature, the personal goals casually defined as expectations have also been presented as personal strivings (Emmons, 1986), personal projects (Little *et al.*, 2007), or simply life tasks, which individuals pursue in unique ways (Cantor *et al.*, 1991). All these perspectives share a common theme, in that they are all based on an individual desiring to accomplish something meaningful. Personal goals influence how people make choices and steer their own development and in a broader sense, structure the experience of daily life (Cantor *et al.*, 1991, p. 425). Psychological research also addresses goal constructs in relation to

the progress associated with the understanding of cognition, personality and motivation, defining personal goals as internal representations of desired states (Austin and Vancouver, 1996, p. 338). The goal theory serves as a basis for hope theory (Snyder, 2002), which focuses on goals as anchors from which mental processes evolve. Hope theory has been shown to offer a useful way to understand DCCs' expatriation exploration (Harvey, Novicevic and Breland, 2009), and the theory seems to be particularly appropriate because it defines and ties the concept of the psychological state of hope to personal goals, pathways thinking, and agency thinking. The addition of the concepts of pathways and agency to hope theory offers the ability to further decompose the process of the formation of goals, and to expose an individual's psychological state. For those reasons, hope theory seems more appropriate than earlier constructs like the theory of met expectations (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001) to describe continuous psychological processes during expatriation.

Hope has been defined as a "positive motivational state that is based on interactively derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (planning to meet goals)" (Snyder *et al.*, 1991, p. 571). Furthermore, it conceptualizes high-hope people as those who have confidence in their pathway, a plausible route to reach their goal, as well as agency, and a perceived capacity to follow this pathway. High-hope people are expected not only to be more decisive than low-hope people (Snyder, 2002) but also be ready to produce multiple alternatives to reach their goals.

Goals are the central construct of hope theory, serving as a cognitive component based on the assumption that human actions are goal oriented (Snyder, 2002). Goals may be described visually or verbally and serve as targets for human actions; they may vary in terms of their timeframe and may have various levels of specificity.

Pathways thinking conceptualized using hope theory emerges from the concept of thinking in the context of time and humans developing ways taking them from point A, where they are currently, to point B, the state defined in their goal. High-hope people define multiple pathways to reach their goals as compared to low-hope people who are unlikely to have alternative routes to reach their goal.

Agency thinking is the "perceived capacity to use one's pathway to reach the desired goal" (Snyder, 2002). This self-belief is an essential component for generating a state of hope and motivating an individual to progress on his or her chosen pathway toward the goal, combating potential challenges along the way (Snyder *et al.*, 1991; Snyder, 2002). Research has shown that the agency becomes deflated when people encounter barriers that impact on their personal ego and that high-hope individuals can be expected to rebound relatively fast (Baumeister and Exline, 2000). Agency thinking relates well to an earlier concept of self-efficacy described as task-specific confidence (Locke *et al.*, 1986), although it differs by tying the confidence state to a short term strategic capacity related to a specific pathway and goal, while self-efficacy seems to instead be a long-term personal trait.

The strong career engagement of the members of DCCs and the often-changing career coordination strategies defined as pathways in hope theory (Känsälä *et al.*, 2015; Bird and Schnurman-Crook, 2005) suggest that members of DCCs would often be naturally socialized as high-hope people, who have developed an ability to set and achieve personal goals during their life before their international experiences (Baumeister and Exline, 2000). One of the views on hope also defines its particular applicability to the situation of deprivation when the current circumstances of a person are unsatisfactory, and hence, the person defines goals and pathways to repair their life situation, generating a psychological state of hope. This seems to be particularly applicable to the situation of partners in DCCs, who often find it difficult to continue their careers from an international location, feeling unsatisfied with their progress, which, in turn, could result in becoming a source of conflict (Tharenou, 2008) thereby generating alternative solutions such as an increased willingness to return to their home country (McNulty and Moeller, 2017; Vance and McNulty, 2014).

In the dual-career context, couples seem to be quite successful in developing a personal goal system with supportive links between their goals (Wiese and Salmela-Aro, 2008). Furthermore, it is expected that DCCs experience greater life satisfaction when they have a balanced goal system rather than a goal system focusing primarily on either work or family (Salmela-Aro, 2009). The support that partners give each other to pursue their goals seems to affect their satisfaction with the relationship (Brunstein *et al.*, 1996), and they tend to undertake diverse support roles (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011).

Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research design was used to provide an in-depth understanding of the evolution of goals and to isolate distill nuances related to the changing pathways and agency of DCCs as they go through their expatriation process. Both the expatriate and the DCC partner were interviewed so as to fully understand the impact of partner experiences on the career decisions made by the partners in DCCs who need to integrate their careers as a family unit. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse set of 14 highly skilled and well-educated expatriate couples (28 interviews in total). The sample recruitment applied a stringent selection logic to adhere to the adopted definition of DCCs (Challiol and Mignonac, 2005). Those criteria included both partners having a university degree, a professional career, and being engaged in continual professional employment (Bradbury, 1994). In addition, the couple had to complete the entire assigned expatriation process, and both partners were expected to be working before the onset of the assignment. It was not mandatory for both partners to work while on an assignment, as that is not always feasible (Vance and McNulty, 2014); however, excluding couples from the sample where one partner did not work could introduce a bias into the results. The ideal time to have such an interview was seen as about one year after returning from the expatriate assignment, as then repatriation adjustment should have been complete, but the experiences acquired on assignment would be relatively recent and easily recalled. In our sample, the interviews were conducted 19 months after return from the assignment on average and the time span ranged from 8 to 42 months.

The sample selection criteria necessitated a broad recruitment scope in the process identifying potential candidates. First, the existing expatriate databases from previous surveys carried out by the author's research group were consulted. Second, a snowball method was employed to recruit additional respondents known to those DCCs already in the study or those that did not qualify owing to the selection criteria. The final sample (see Table I) included male ($n=8$) and female ($n=6$) expatriates, and their dual-career partners. All the expatriates worked in the private sector (i.e. telecommunications, electronics, FMCG, tobacco, construction, machine building and banking).

The expatriate and the partner were interviewed separately, and interviews were conducted either in person or by telephone in cases where it was impossible to conduct face-to-face meetings. All the interviews were recorded. An interview guide was prepared, which was checked by two senior researchers and one human resource specialist for validity (Bryman and Bell, 2003) before the guide was piloted with the first couple. Each interview was based on the same guidelines, so as to cover a comparable range of topics. Simultaneously, issues that were particularly relevant to a respondent were sometimes discussed more extensively to allow interesting new lines of discovery to emerge and to foster free-flowing discussion. After initial questions about the assignment, participants were asked about their goals, pathways, and previous agency, during and after the completion of the assignment.

A replication logic (Silverman, 2013; Rowley, 2002) approach was used in the analysis to foster external validity. Initially, all the available material was reviewed to identify the main findings (e.g. categories of goals and what was changing) and to

No.	Assignment characteristics		Primary expatriate			Dual career partner			Worked after the repatriation
	Host country	Length	Nationality	Gender	Nationality	Gender	Worked before the expatriation	Worked during the expatriation	
1	Romania	3	American	Female	Polish	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Ireland	3	Polish	Male	Polish	Female	Yes	No	Yes
3	Germany	3	Finnish	Female	Finnish	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Finland	3	Polish	Male	Polish	Female	Yes	Yes,	Yes
5	Finland	3	American	Female	American	Male	Yes	remotely Yes, at the final stage	Yes
6	China	2	Finnish	Female	Finnish	Male	Yes	No	Yes
7	Japan	2	American	Male	American	Female	Yes	Yes, Part time	Yes
8	Finland	3	Polish	Male	Polish	Female	Yes	Yes, Remotely	Yes
9	France	2	Polish	Male	Polish	Female	Yes	No	Yes
10	Finland	3	American	Female	American	Male	Yes	No	Yes
11	Switzerland	1	Polish	Female	Polish	Male	Yes	No	Yes
12	Finland	3.5	American	Male	American	Female	Yes	No	Looking for a job at the time of the interview
13	Russia	3,5	Belgium	Male	Belgium	Female	Yes	Yes, part time at the final stage	Yes
14	China	2	Finnish	Male	Finnish	Female	Yes	No	Yes

Table I.
Interview sample

generate a first coding frame, employing a concept-driven (deductive) method combined with a data-driven (inductive) approach (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015). MaxQDA software was used to initially code the interview transcripts (Flick, 2014). The coding frame was subsequently refined to group the findings and respondents' quotes into key categories. The coding process helped to understand the key themes emerging in the data, to index the findings, and to discover and formulate new levels of interpretation. The topics repeating in multiple expatriate-partner pairs were selected for this study to maximize the internal and external replicability of its findings. Each expatriate-partner situation was observed as a separate case study to make it possible to achieve theoretical generalization and replication based on deep, repeating qualitative evidence (Rowley, 2002).

Findings

The main objective of this study is to discuss the changing career goals, pathways and agency identifiable among dual-career partners who have experienced the complete cycle of international expatriation. The responses of both partners are analyzed so as to completely understand the career decisions made by DCC partners who need to integrate their careers with a family unit. The comprehensive perspective on the goals derived from the interviews show a diverse range of expectations relating not only to career but also to family internationalization, children's education, travel and adventure. Owing to the central role of career concerns among DCCs and the limitations of the length of the paper, this study focuses on the goals reported by dual-career partners pertaining to the development of their careers. The goals and hope construct of an expatriate will also be discussed only where they interrelate and affect the experiences of the partner.

Pre-departure stage

The couples clearly indicated that the expatriation decision was driven by the career progress of the expatriate. The partners interviewed declared that the career of the expatriate was the dominant reason for them living abroad, rather than any personal reasons. The partner appreciated the opportunities and long-term career benefits related to such an international assignment experience and very strongly supported it, despite the temporary suspension of his or her own career. This is how partners reported it:

It was about [...] (my husband's) career. His main goal was professional development. (partner of a Polish male expatriate in Ireland)

That meant a lot to (my wife). I am sure that expat experience is always good for her career [...] My professional side was really a small role in the whole thing. (partner of a Finnish female expatriate in Germany)

This supportive approach of their partners was highly valued by the dual-career expatriates, which is very important, as earlier research has classified this supportive role of the partner as crucial for the decision to expatriate and to subsequent adjustment (Haslberger and Brewster, 2008; Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011):

She wanted me to grow in terms of my career. Her intention was that I would take up that assignment and grow [...]. (American male expatriate in Finland)

The concentration on the expatriate's career at a given moment in life rather than one's own career does not mean an abandonment of all personal professional ambition. As previous studies report (Känsälä *et al.*, 2015; Caligiuri and Phillips, 2003) and as confirmed by this research, a proposed international assignment is likely to have appeared at the right time for both partners. Some of the active partners agreed to leave with family-oriented goals, particularly with the objective of expanding the family, supporting children's international education, experience a new culture or to learn the required local language, which at least provided a pathway to some personal professional development by investing in skills needed in future jobs. It appears that the strong career orientation of the partners has been temporarily deprioritized, elevating family goals such that they have positive agency and clear pathways. In other words, they see a realistic way to pursue positive family development during the assignment, as well as believing in the personal ability to make it happen.

In summary, dual-career expatriates and their partners are full of hope when they leave for an assignment, and they have clear goals, pathways, and high levels of agency. Partners also agree to go abroad as they value the international experience for the family, and despite their own psychological commitment to work, support the decision to suspend their career to leverage the opportunity of the assigned expatriate to develop in their jobs abroad.

During the assignment

Many partners, however, quickly started to miss having a job, a sense of being needed and important, or simply began to feel they were making little contribution. The assumption that they can mentally cope with a life without a career becomes increasingly challenging over time, and eventually can become difficult to accept. The deeply unsatisfied psychological need for professional activity, as well as the lack of a feeling of progress or contribution, radically changes the feeling of hope, leading to the establishment of new goals relating to employment. The often-adequate progress of other goals such as the education of children, travel, or learning new cultures, becomes less satisfying and insufficient in the context of a lack of a job; therefore, these family- and adventure-related goals are consequently reassessed and deprioritized. The positive agency disappears, and it is the frustration,

exhaustion, and a feeling of lack of importance and resignation that starts to prevail. This is how the dual-career partners reported it:

It was really tough for me. Before we moved I was so much excited about it [...]. But being home with the child, then with children raised a lot of frustration and thoughts like: I am a well-educated woman, with a lot of plans and ambitions. What am I doing here? (partner of a Polish male expatriate in France)

"I felt depressed, really physically and emotionally depressed. When I was in the United States, I was working and doing my teaching studies. I was so busy. Every minute of my day was busy, busy, busy. And when I came to Tokyo, I had nothing to do. I had nothing to do. There is this sense of – what am I supposed to be doing? (partner of an American male expatriate in Japan).

As is typical of high-hope, educated individuals (Snyder *et al.*, 2001), they first really want to focus on their initial goal, find a new pathway to succeed with the original plan, and only later look for alternative routes, often including trying new types of careers or types of employment. It quickly became apparent, however, in a dominant number of interviews that even the dual-career partners who succeeded in finding a job, in most cases, had to accept working part-time and most often in jobs that did not match up to their qualifications. This situation is attributed to issues inherent in working abroad: lack of visas, networks, local experience, industry accreditations and language skills, which are consistently reported to be challenges for dual-career partners (Kupka and Cathro, 2007; Ravasi *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, for all these reasons, even for those who found a part-time job or started a business, this temporary engagement most often did not fulfill their strong developmental aspirations and did not restore a satisfactory level of hope. This is how they reported it in the interviews:

I was doing very basic things. I shouldn't call it work [...] It was not a hospital. No contact with patients. My responsibility was more to clean corridors rather than to do any important work. (partner of a Belgian male expatriate in Russia)

I was also looking for a new job and opened this start-up idea to help Finnish companies enter the US market. I really wanted to make it work, but it was a hassle. (partner of an American female expatriate in Finland)

The lack of work in most cases and the state of underemployment in the remaining ones caused hope to become depleted, an increase in negative emotions and intense discussion at home around the frustrations caused by the lack of a job and the career progression of the partner. This, as observed in earlier research (Tharenou, 2008; Ravasi *et al.*, 2013) has a cross-over effect on the adjustment of an expatriate (Andreason, 2008; Lazarova *et al.*, 2010), leading to increased stress in the family unit. The very important supportive role of the partner starts to weaken concurrently with the depletion of hope and agency. This is how some of the expatriates reported the changing situation at home:

We argued about it many times being in Russia [...] So, there were negative emotions around it [...] I know women that like to stay at home and take care of the house, so it is a matter of personality. [...] (my wife) doesn't belong to this group. (Belgian male expatriate in Russia)

Repatriation stage

Frustration caused by the lack of work leads to a complete turnaround in the hierarchy of goals. The initial high-hope of the partner related to expatriation, all the support and motivation provided to the expatriate to accept the assignment, and the complete set of pathways and agency thinking related to satisfying the partner's own goals turns to focus on one new goal: a strong need to resume professional activity. The first pathway to meet this goal typically includes the concept of finding a job abroad, that is, in the country of expatriation.

When this proves to be difficult to accomplish, the alternative pathway of a return home becomes the next plan, which is increasingly enforced on the family, and, in particular, also on the expatriate. The analysis of the interviews consistently confirms that the main motivation of DCCs returning home and the primary objective of such repatriation is the goal of the partner to resume professional activity in light of the partner's becoming weary of being simply a homemaker. This is how partners talk about their goals at that time:

I think I was the driving force behind that. I had no career, no work in any sense. It's hard to say, Gosh, I'd like to say that it was the family or being homesick, missing the people who had stayed in Poland. But come to think of it, I'm wondering whether that was it and I guess we came back because I missed work, I missed development, I missed the feeling of being important. (partner of a Polish male expatriate in Ireland)

Even the expatriates themselves declare in their interviews that the return of their partners to professional activity is the primary goal for repatriation, and far less often mention their own career as an important goal of this approaching and significant life transition. The question of goals related to the return is largely answered by statements describing the career goals of the partner. The professional goals of the expatriate or caring about their own professional progress, which is very important at the time of expatriation, are rarely cited:

First of all (my husband) definitely needed to get away from Romania, he needed something new, he needed a new work assignment. So I could have potentially stayed one more year, that would have been good for me at work, but we had said three years and he was antsy. (American female expatriate in Romania)

Her goals were to come back to the company, set it straight and start doing what she likes [...]. I wanted my wife to continue her work and for us to be able to have dual-careers in the family again. (Polish male expatriate in Finland)

This agreement of the expatriate to return home motivated by the support of the DCC partner's career goals is provided, even though in some of the reported cases, the expatriates were abandoning their assignment prematurely or rejecting a lucrative contract extension. Although the career impacts of expatriation were mainly positive for the expatriates in the present sample, there were also some cases in which expatriates reported that the return had a negative impact on their career. In these cases, even on the expatriate side, there is a clear declaration that the return was motivated by the partner's need to return to work and not their own goals, which is in contrast to the situation defined before departure, where the focus was on the career of the partner rather than the assigned expatriate:

I did worry about coming back in terms of jobs. The position I'd had before leaving was taken, someone else got hired. So, I feared whether they'd have something for me. And indeed, what I was offered was a bit of a dead-end [...]. (Polish male expatriate in Ireland)

As far as my career was concerned, I made a step back. We decided to go back to Poland and I returned to the post I was at before my departure. Unless my mobility changes, I have no possibility of further career development [...]. (Polish male expatriate in Finland)

Future international assignment willingness

While all the interviewed couples had decided to repatriate back to their home countries, the couples' interests in a possible future international career varied to some extent: some couples would go again, while some of the couples clearly would not, predominantly arguing that it would be difficult to realize the professional career aspirations of both partners:

Now, no. Because of my wife's career [...]. (Polish male expatriate in France)

I wouldn't even talk to (my wife) [...]. (Polish male expatriate in Finland)

For those open to the idea of future expatriation, the move would need to be very clearly connected with a job opportunity for both members of the DCC:

It depends on the conditions of the contract. I do not think that he would sign up for another two years of sitting at home. (Finnish female expatriate in China)

No, I think [...] no [...] and if yes, with clear conditions [...] To have a job, not to be limited to following your husband. It is extremely important. (partner of the Belgian male expatriate in Russia)

In summary, the goals shift by 180 degrees toward a focus on finding a plausible pathway to fulfill the partner's need for career progression, which often leads to the repatriation decision. This is motivated by the desire of the partner to recommence professional career development, which is also strongly supported by the dual-career expatriate, who may even give up some of their own professional opportunities to help the partner restore hope. Goals are thus reprioritized to restore the feelings of hope of both partners, and even if in some cases it may involve negative consequences for the career of the expatriate, the couple shows high-hope attitudes and agency to make it happen. In light of their experiences, future international careers could be considered only by some couples and only if job opportunities were available for both abroad.

Conclusions and implications for theory and practice

This research increased the understanding of a largely neglected and rapidly evolving field of DCC expatriation. The results confirm the applicability of hope theory to building an understanding of DCC phenomena, as called for by Harvey, Novicevic and Breland (2009). For the first time, we have been able to use hope theory to explain the expatriation experience of dual-career partners through the entire expatriate cycle. Both the expatriates and the partners were able to relate to, describe, and assess the goals that guided their experiences at each phase of their expatriation. They could also describe pathways conceptualized to achieve the goals and frequently commented on the associated emotions providing insights into the development of agency thinking (Snyder, 2002). This may be attributed to the specific situation of a DCC, where both members are educated, and expatriation decision is more complex and therefore analyzed by both partners in depth, yielding better goal clarity, and permitting a clear identification of pathways serving the achievement of goals. Consistent with earlier research and commonly found among high-hope individuals (Baumeister and Exline, 2000), the results indicate that the goals and pathways of the expatriate and the dual-career partner changed as the expatriate experience progressed, so they came to be focused on trying to maintain and restore hope (Figure 1). The considerably different nature of the goals hypothesized for the next assignment is somewhat consistent with earlier research on goal transitions during important life changes (Little *et al.*, 2007; Salmela-Aro, 2009). An understanding of the patterns of these shifts facilitates scientific progress by explaining the different types of issues and motivators experienced by DCCs.

Alongside the scientific contribution, these findings may be of practical use to DCCs and international human resource managers, because they provide a deeper understanding of the processes a DCC unit goes through, which allows for better recognition of the attitudes and motivations of such employees during an assignment. First, if the DCC partner does not have opportunities for employment, owing to issues obtaining a work visa, language barriers, or other issues, such assignments need to be planned for shorter periods of time. As time progresses, we observe an increase in stress and heightened pressure from the partner to return home. If the assignee is required at the host location for a longer period, human resource managers need to take care of all possible arrangements to allow for the continuation of the career of the partner. Many spousal support practices have been called for in earlier research (Kierner, 2015), including culture and language training, or support for self-employment, and financing volunteer activities (Moore, 2002). Even if these are reported to be among the most valued support practices by the employees (Konopaske and Werner, 2005),

Figure 1.
The changing nature
of hope: goals,
pathways, and agency
of the DCC partner

	Before Expatriation	During Expatriation	Before Repatriation
Partner goals What do I want? +	Support expat's career Develop family Explore culture	Re-start own career abroad	Repatriate to restart own career at home
Pathways How will I achieve it? +	Move abroad with expat Education of children Travel	Look for a job abroad Consider charity work Start-up own business	Return to own job at home Convince expat to end assignment
Agency Can I do it? ↓	Full belief in own abilities	Deflated belief in own abilities	Reestablished belief in own abilities
Hope Emotional state	High Hope	Diminished Hope	Restored Hope

this study clearly suggests that this is not enough. To ensure full adjustment, the DCC partner would need to have meaningful employment that guarantees his/her career can progress. Since the spousal support role is so important for the complete adjustment of the expatriate (Lauring and Selmer, 2010; Haslberger and Brewster, 2008) and to avoid negative cross-over effects (Andreason, 2008; Lazarova *et al.*, 2010) affecting the adjustment and job performance of the assigned expatriate, human resource managers would be advised to ensure that the partner has a valid work visa, job hunting support or ideally, MNCs should offer employment for the partner.

Furthermore, understanding the changing nature of goals could help managers of expatriates select and apply the most appropriate motivational approach. It is well understood that new assignees are under pressure during the initial phase of the assignment when they need to adjust to the new environment at work and in their private life (Haslberger *et al.*, 2012; Lazarova *et al.*, 2010). This study suggests that in the case of DCCs where the partner does not secure any employment, the family pressures may be even greater a few months after the start of the assignment when the partner loses his/her agency and starts to adjust the family pathways to align with repatriation. Managers of expatriates can be far more effective when they also understand the situation of the partner, empathize with it, provide the necessary help and monitoring to be aware of, rather than be surprised by, reduced levels of motivation or a desire for premature repatriation. Finally, if MNCs wish to reassign a DCC expatriate, they need to understand that securing a fulfilling job for the partner can be the primary motivating factor for the couple to agree to accept an assignment.

The present study has several limitations. Its sample selection was focused on DCCs, who typically come from western countries with strong dual-career traditions and high levels of female participation in the workforce, so the findings can only be generalized to such cultures and situations where both partners are career-engaged. The paper focuses on a career perspective, meaning it necessarily devotes little attention to other goals such as giving children an international experience, to being able to travel, or devoting more time to the family, or using the time to learn languages or engage in further education. These goals appeared to be important to the participants in all phases of the assignment and are the subject of traditional adjustment research. Further research on such alternative goals would thus be useful to fully understand the goals and pathways of couples in broader terms than only those of the career.

Hope theory, however, mainly focuses on the goals of the individual while many of these broader goals have been reported as shared family goals, or in a few situations, individuals

had goals that were about progressing the interests of the other family members such as the partner or children. Hope theory, as conceptualized in the current research (Snyder, 2002), seems to underestimate the importance of these types of goals in building agency and hope for individuals living in tight family units, such as expatriated DCCs, and it could be expanded. Finally, despite the comparably large and diverse sample for a qualitative study and the care taken to ensure the replicability of the findings, further representative quantitative research should also be undertaken. Ideally, such a study would employ a longitudinal sample, with interviews conducted multiple times with the same couples to capture the major milestones of their assignments soon after they occur to minimize possible recall errors.

References

- Andreason, A.W. (2008), "Expatriate adjustment of spouses and expatriate managers: an integrative research review", *International Journal of Management*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 382-395.
- Andreason, A.W. and Kinneer, K.D. (2005), "Repatriation adjustment problems and the successful reintegration of expatriates and their families", *Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 109-126.
- Austin, J.T. and Vancouver, J.B. (1996), "Goal constructs in psychology: structure, process, and content", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 120 No. 3, pp. 338.
- Aycan, Z. (1997), "Expatriate adjustment as a multifaceted phenomenon: Individual and organizational level predictors", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 8 No. 4, pp. 434-456.
- Baird, M. and Reeves, K. (2011), "Breaking the roles: female breadwinner families", *4th International Community, Work and Family Conference, Tampere, May 19-21*.
- Baumeister, R.F. and Exline, J.J. (2000), "Self-control, morality, and human strength", *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 29-42.
- Bird, G. and Schnurman-Crook, A. (2005), "Professional identity and coping behaviors in dual-career couples", *Family Relations*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 145-160.
- Bradbury, S.L. (1994), "Dual career couples in R&D labs", *Research-Technology Management*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 45-48.
- Brandén, M. (2013), "Couples' education and regional mobility – the importance of occupation, income and gender", *Population, Space and Place*, Vol. 19 No. 5, pp. 522-536.
- Braseby, A.M. (2010), "Adaptation of trailing spouses: does gender matter?", doctoral dissertation, Florida International University, Miami, FL.
- Brookfield, G.M.A.C. (2016), *Global Relocation Trends Survey Report 2013*, Brookfield Global Relocation Services, Chicago, IL.
- Bruce, W.M. and Reed, C.M. (1991), *Dual-career Couples in the Public Sector: A Management Guide for Human Resource Professionals*, Greenwood Publishing Group, New York, NY.
- Brunstein, J.C., Dangelmayer, G. and Schultheiss, O.C. (1996), "Personal goals and social support in close relationships: effects on relationship mood and marital satisfaction", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 71 No. 5, pp. 1006-1019.
- Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2003), *Synthesizing Research. A Guide for Literature Reviews*, 3rd ed., Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Caligiuri, P., Phillips, J., Lazarova, M., Tarique, I. and Burgi, P. (2001), "The theory of met expectations applied to expatriate adjustment: the role of crosscultural training", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 357-372.
- Caligiuri, P.M. and Phillips, J.M. (2003), "An application of self-assessment realistic job previews to expatriate assignments", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 14 No. 7, pp. 1102-1116.
- Cantor, N., Norem, J., Langston, C., Zirkel, S., Fleeson, W. and Cook-Flannagan, C. (1991), "Life tasks and daily life experience", *Journal of Personality*, Vol. 59 No. 3, pp. 425-451.

- Challiol, H. and Mignonac, K. (2005), "Relocation decision-making and couple relationships: a quantitative and qualitative study of dual-earner couples", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 247-274.
- Emmons, R.A. (1986), "Personal strivings: an approach to personality and subjective well-being", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 51 No. 5, pp. 1058.
- Eriksson, P. and Kovalainen, A. (2015), *Qualitative Methods in Business Research: A Practical Guide to Social Research*, Sage Publications, London.
- Flick, U. (2014), *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, London.
- Harvey, M. (1998), "Dual-career couples during international relocation: the trailing spouse", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 309-331.
- Harvey, M., Napier, N. and Moeller, M. (2009), "Interpreting dual-career couples' family life-cycles: identifying strategic windows of global career opportunity", *Research and Practice in Human Resource Management*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 14-35.
- Harvey, M., Novicevic, M. and Breland, J.W. (2009), "Global dual-career exploration and the role of hope and curiosity during the process", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 178-197.
- Haslberger, A. and Brewster, C. (2008), "The expatriate family – an international perspective", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 324-346.
- Haslberger, A., Brewster, C. and Hippler, T. (2012), "Repatriation and repatriation adjustment – individual and organisational perspectives", *The 12th European Academy of Management Proceedings, Rotterdam, Holland*.
- Känsälä, M., Mäkelä, L. and Suutari, V. (2015), "Career coordination strategies among dual career expatriate couples", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 26 No. 17, pp. 2187-2210.
- Kierner, A. (2015), "Dual-income and dual-career couples in international context", in Mäkelä, L. and Suutari, V. (Eds), *Work and Family Interface in the International Career Context*, Springer International Publishing, Cham, pp. 95-116.
- Kierner, A. and Suutari, V. (2017), "Repatriation of dual-career couples", *Thunderbird International Business Review*, pp. 1-11, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.21947>
- Konopaske, R. and Werner, S. (2005), "US managers' willingness to accept a global assignment: do expatriate benefits and assignment length make a difference?", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 16 No. 7, pp. 1159-1175.
- Konopaske, R., Robie, C. and Ivancevich, J.M. (2005), "A preliminary model of spouse influence on managerial global assignment willingness", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 405-426.
- Kupka, B. and Cathro, V. (2007), "Desperate housewives – social and professional isolation of German expatriated spouses", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 18 No. 6, pp. 951-968.
- Lauring, J. and Selmer, J. (2010), "The supportive expatriate spouse: an ethnographic study of spouse involvement in expatriate careers", *International Business Review*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 59-69.
- Lazarova, M., Westman, M. and Shaffer, M.A. (2010), "Elucidating the positive side of the work-family interface on international assignments: a model of expatriate work and family performance", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 35 No. 1, pp. 93-117.
- Little, B.R., Salmela-Aro, K.E. and Phillips, S.D. (2007), *Personal Project Pursuit: Goals, Action, and Human Flourishing*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, Mahwah, NJ.
- Locke, E.A., Motowidlo, S. and Bobko, P. (1986), "Using self-efficacy theory to resolve the conflict between goal-setting theory and expectancy theory in organizational behavior and industrial/organizational psychology", *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 328-338.
- McNulty, Y. (2012), "Being dumped in to sink or swim': an empirical study of organizational support for the trailing spouse", *Human Resource Development International*, Vol. 15 No. 4, pp. 417-434.

- McNulty, Y. and Moeller, M. (2017), "A typology of dual-career expatriate (trailing) spouses: the 'R' profiles", in Dickmann, M., Suutari, V. and Wurtz, O. (Eds), *The Management of Global Careers: Exploring the Rise of International Work*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, pp. 257-290.
- Mäkelä, L., Käsäälä, M. and Suutari, V. (2011), "The roles of expatriates' spouses among dual career couples", *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 185-197.
- Moore, M.J. (2002), "Same ticket, different trip: supporting dual-career couples on global assignments", *Women in Management Review*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 61-67.
- Rapoport, R. and Rapoport, R.N. (1969), "The dual career family: a variant pattern and social change", *Human Relations*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 3-30.
- Ravasi, C., Salamin, X. and Davoine, E. (2013), "The challenge of dual career expatriate management in a specific host national environment: an exploratory study of expatriate and spouse adjustment in Switzerland based MNCs", Working Papers SES No. 447, Université de Fribourg, Fribourg, pp. 1-38.
- Rowley, J. (2002), "Using case studies in research", *Management Research News*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 16-27.
- Rusconi, A., Moen, P. and Kaduk, A. (2013), "Career priorities and pathways across the (gendered) life course", in Major, D.A. and Burke, R. (Eds), *Handbook of Work-Life Integration Among Professionals: Challenges and Opportunities*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, pp. 95-119.
- Salmela-Aro, K. (2009), "Personal goals and well-being during critical life transitions: the four C's – channelling, choice, co-agency and compensation", *Advances in Life Course Research*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 63-73.
- Sánchez-Vidal, M.E., Sanz Valle, R. and Barba Aragón, M.I. (2008), "International workers' satisfaction with the repatriation process", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 19 No. 9, pp. 1683-1702.
- Silverman, D. (2013), *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*, 4th ed., SAGE Publications, London.
- Snyder, C.R. (2002), "Hope theory: rainbows in the mind", *Psychological Inquiry*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 249-275.
- Snyder, C.R., Simpson, S.C., Michael, S.T. and Cheavens, J. (2001), "Optimism and hope constructs: variants on a positive expectancy theme", *Optimism and Pessimism: Implications for theory, Research, and Practice*, pp. 101-125.
- Snyder, C.R., Harris, C., Anderson, J.R., Holleran, S.A., Irving, L.M., Sigmon, S.T. and Harney, P. (1991), "The will and the ways: development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 60 No. 4, pp. 570-585.
- Suutari, V. and Brewster, C. (2003), "Repatriation: empirical evidence from a longitudinal study of careers and expectations among Finnish expatriates", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 14 No. 7, pp. 1132-1151.
- Szkudlarek, B. (2010), "Reentry – a review of the literature", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 1-21.
- Takeuchi, R., Yun, S. and Tesluk, P.E. (2002), "An examination of crossover and spillover effects of spousal and expatriate cross-cultural adjustment on expatriate outcomes", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 87 No. 4, pp. 655.
- Tharenou, P. (2008), "Disruptive decisions to leave home: gender and family differences in expatriation choices", *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, Vol. 105 No. 2, pp. 183-200.
- Vance, C.M. and McNulty, Y. (2014), "Why and how women and men acquire global career experience: a study of American expatriates in Europe", *International Studies of Management & Organization*, Vol. 44 No. 2, pp. 34-54.
- Wiese, B.S. and Salmela-Aro, K. (2008), "Goal conflict and facilitation as predictors of work – family satisfaction and engagement", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 73 No. 3, pp. 490-497.

Corresponding author

Agnieszka Kierner can be contacted at: kierner.a@gmail.com

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com